A CHILD OF THE MEWS

To

Duncan Livingstone

for perfect attendance at

Glenmuick Parish Church Sunday Sch

May - 1906.

A CHILD OF THE MEWS.

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BY

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A CHILD OF THE MEWS.

CHAPTER I.

CHRISTOPHER JOHN HODGES.

HE was born in a mews; and the first time he made his exit from the mews it was to receive the elaborate names of Christopher John Hodges at the neighbouring church. Several of his uncles and his cousins and his aunts came to inspect him after the ceremony.

"Ridiculous name to call him, *I* think," remarked Aunt Hodges. "Quite above his station in life."

Aunt Hodges was a charwoman, and had not been invited to the mews tea-party at all.

"You can call him plain John," said his uncle John, a little inwardly pleased at having his own uncommon name perpetuated in the small bundle under discussion.

"He shall be called Christopher," said his mother, firmly. "It is a beautiful name, and has three syllables. Every second man in the mews is called John, not to mention three of the horses and the cat —dreadful common name, John!"

Uncle John felt squashed, and relapsed into silence.

The total result of it all was, that his mother called him Christopher, his father called him John, and he went through the world under the name of Hodges.

Meantime Christopher John Hodges slept peacefully, and was soon tucked away in an old cradle covered with a shawl, and the tea-party soon forgot his existence, or that he was the unconscious reason of their innocent enjoyment.

Christopher John was no exception to the ordinary run of small boys. He cut his teeth, he was vaccinated, he made inarticulate sounds at the period it was required of him, he crawled, he stood, he walked, and he fell down as often as most other little boys. He grew a certain amount of curly hair of a nondescript colour, and when it was long enough his mother enveloped his wretched little head in a pudding-basin, and having secured the gigantic pair of mews scissors (which were used for nagging the horses' manes and dressing their tails), she clipped manfully round the

edge of the basin, and Christopher John's colourless curls lay on the kitchen floor.

But he was five years old when this happened; and it would not have happened then if Aunt Hodges had not made her unwelcome appearance, and declared that the boy looked like a girl! She could not have offered a greater insult. No sooner had the door closed behind her than Mrs. Hodges descended the stairs in order to find her husband and demand the mews scissors!

Mr. Hodges was grooming down his horses, hissing away like a steam-engine, for it must have been already assumed that he was a coachman, or he would not have lived in a mews.

"I'm going to cut off Christopher's curls," she said, in a tone of determination.

"What! cut off John's curls!" cried Hodges, in consternation.

"Yes," answered Mrs. Hodges.

Hodges gave a low whistle. But he seldom discussed such minor details of life with his wife, so he only fell to grooming his horse with renewed vigour, and hissing like a steam-engine at full pressure.

When Hodges and his two elder sons came up to

tea that evening there were loud exclamations at the sight of Christopher John's head.

"Hullo, Johnny, where's your curls?" cried George the elder, a particular ally of Christopher's.

Now Mrs. Hodges was a little overcome at the havoc she had wrought in the personal appearance of the child. She was a little jealous, too, of Christopher's affection for his step-brother George; so she snubbed George somewhat rudely, and Hodges made no remarks.

But the child Christopher John had grown into the little boy, and the next stage was school.

Now Mrs. Hodges was a laundress. She spent five days out of every week in washing the garments of Mrs. and the five little Miss Carnots of Notting Hill, and her husband spent six days out of every week in driving Mrs. and the five little Miss Carnots about London.

Hodges had kept his situation for eight years now. His first wife had died the first year he came, leaving him with two boys, George and Thomas.

Hodges soon found he could not manage without a wife—putting all their shirts out to wash alone cost so much, and paying for every patch in the boys' coats and trousers. It was ruinous work being a widower.

So he married Mrs. Hodges, a nice, clean, industrious woman, and a good laundress. She made a good mother to his motherless boys, sent them out to their work clean and respectable, and they brought home a little money every week to help with their shoe leather.

Then Christopher John made his appearance, and he very soon monopolized the whole of Mrs. Hodge's affections. Indeed, the young rascal soon monopolized the affections of the whole mews. He would trot about clinging to George's finger. The hostlers would lift him up to sit on one of their horses while they were eating their hay or waiting harnessed to go out.

He soon became a child of the mews, and the language of the mews became his.

They were all sitting at tea one night—Hodges, Mrs. Hodges, George, Thomas, and Christopher John. There was a pause in the conversation.

"Terr'ble fine mare what Mr. Langham got," remarked Christopher, gravely; "so clean in de 'ocks and 'igh in de wivers."

Hodges burst into fits of laughing, which caused such a violent choke that Mrs. Hodges thought his last moments were arriving, and rose nervously from

her chair with a view to tickling his throat with a feather, which she had once learned was the remedy for those *in extremis*.

But Hodges pulled round again without the application of the feather.

"So clean in de 'ocks, is he, Johnny?" he gasped, relapsing into another fit of laughter; "and so 'igh in de wivers? What do you know about it?"

Christopher did not see where the joke lay. He was repeating what John the hostler had said about a new importation into the mews, for the edification of his family. It certainly seemed edifying.

"Yes," he said, repeating word for word John's estimate of the mare as his own, "igh in de wivers, but I fink she may be a lickle weak in de fetlocks."

"Oh, you do, do you?" shouted George; while Hodges was still too convulsed to speak.

But it was all double Dutch to Mrs. Hodges, as much as it was to Christopher John himself. She disliked Christopher's close connection with the mews, and his affection for the hostlers and horses.

"I tell you what, Hodges, Christopher shall go to school next Monday morning as ever is."

And to school Christopher accordingly went.

CHAPTER II.

OF CHRISTOPHER'S LOVE.

CHRISTOPHER soon became as much a favourite with his teachers at school as he was at home and in the mews. He was an attractive-looking child, even though his curls had been severed by means of the mews scissors. The memory that could remember the points of a horse could likewise remember the facts taught him at school. He would invariably repeat all his lessons to his mother at tea when she got home from her work, and many a stray scrap of information did the family pick up from the infant school. The family were very proud of Christopher's learning, and as time went on they planned to make a scholar of him.

He had just been discoursing to them on the wonders of a coffee-berry, about which he had learned that day, when Hodges remarked,—

"Why, Johnny, you'll make a scholar yet."

"Don't want to be a scholar," remarked Christopher.

"I shall be a hostler like John. I'm only learning quick so as I can leave quick, and get about the 'orses."

"No, no, Christopher. You are not going to be a hostler and live in a mews all your life, talking and thinking of nothing but horses by day and by night. It's bad enough now with three men talking nothing else but about them brutes. Why, a horse is a horse, and there's an end of it, as long as he's four legs to go upon. Bless me, what does it matter if he's got 'wetlocks' or 'fithers' or all the rest of it? If he tumbles down you get another. But all this talk of nothing but horses from morning to night, it's sickening; and Christopher shall not go into stabling—not as long as I'm alive."

Christopher gasped.

This was the first time Mrs. Hodges had spoken strongly on the subject. It was an understood thing that Christopher should follow the profession of his father and step-brothers, and nothing else ever entered anybody's head.

Now Christopher looked blank. He loved his mother, loved her very dearly, and she idolized him.

A sudden cloud seemed to come over his life. His mother's will had always been his law, and there was

time enough yet to work her round to look kindly on the life he had already planned for himself. So he only remarked firmly,—

"I shall be a hostler when I'm a man."

Indeed, all his spare time was spent in the mews. His mother did not come in till late, and, sooner than play with the other boys, he would run back to the mews and lend a hand all round with the horses.

Nothing in the world made him so happy as to be allowed to feed *Jessica*, the oldest mare in the stables. He could barely reach to put the hay into the manger; it was only by dint of standing on his toes right under her nose that he could put it in. Now, he was sometimes allowed to hold the bucket of water for the horses to drink from, and even to help to groom some of them.

They were mostly a very quiet set of old carriage and cab horses that lived in that Notting Hill mews. A great many of them had seen better days, had pranced down Piccadilly in silver-mounted harness adorned with coronets, had hunted with the best of packs and the most reckless of huntsmen; but for some reason or other they had found their way to Mr. Stanley's mews, where, on the whole, they found a good home and not rougher treatment than

falls to the lot of most old horses, who must work to the end like the rest of us.

Christopher's presence must have reminded some of them of palmy days gone by; he rarely went to *Jessica* without a bit of sugar or bread to give her, and she neighed out when she heard his little step running over the flags of the stable-yard.

True, the sugar was often taken out of his own tea. He had a clever way of extracting it out of his cup without attracting attention to what he was doing. He would watch the lumps going in—and he was dearly fond of sweet tea—then, before they had time to melt, he would call out,—

"Oh, look, see there, mother!" half-jumping up and pointing to the window.

Mrs. Hodges, who was of a curious turn of mind, invariably jumped up and ran to the window, while the others turned their heads in that direction. Meantime Christopher, like a shot, whipped the sugar out of his cup, and thrust it quickly into his pocket for *Jessica*.

"Well, whatever is there to look at there?" cried Mrs. Hodges, disappointedly.

"Why, the sweep was passing home to tea, and his pony *Bobby* is lame on the off hind," said Christopher, gravely.

"You silly boy," cried his mother, "who cares to see the sweep pass? and what does it matter if his pony is lame or not?"

"It matters a great deal," said Christopher; "and he'll be had up one day for driving *Bobby*—he's got a spavin. I spoke to him one day, and he—"

"What cheek!" cried George. "Fancy you, chit, speaking to Jim Stone about his pony; what do you know?"

Christopher got very red and hot.

"I only know a man's a brute who can be unkind to his pony, and drive him in pain," he said, with emphasis, and the subject was dropped.

Not only every horse was known personally to Christopher in the mews, but he knew every pony in the neighbourhood, and his heart was often wrung for the poor beasts in cruel hands.

One day he was coming back from school when a butcher passed him driving a pony which was evidently dead tired, if not ill. He was lashing into it mercilessly, and Christopher's blood boiled.

"Leave off, leave off this minute!" he cried, hotly, "or, I'll—I'll tell my father."

The butcher man looked at the child's distress, then he laughed heartlessly. "Go and tell your father,

then," he cried; "and then learn to mind your own business."

Poor Christopher was miserable, and the thought of that poor, tired pony haunted him throughout the day. It was the one subject on which he and his mother were out of sympathy. To her always a horse was a horse, a pony was a pony. They had been given four legs to go on, and go they must, whether tired or fresh; and if they couldn't go, they must be shot and put out of the way, that was all. There was nothing to make a fuss about, she told Christopher. *We* had to go when *we* were tired, and nobody wasted much pity on us. No, Christopher must not be a silly little boy.

So the worthy Mrs. Hodges tried to check the child's love of horses, hoping thereby to "make a man of him," as she expressed it, and to wean him from stable life.

"Christopher must be a scholar," she said. "He shall never be a stable-boy."

CHAPTER III.

"I WILL TRY TO BE A SCHOLAR."

SO Christopher suppressed his feelings to his mother, and mostly saved them for John, the head hostler of the establishment, and for George his brother, who was a hard-working groom with no feelings of any sort developed at present. This was a distinct advantage for mews life, for in cold blood George could take out the tired horses without so much as knowing if they were tired or not, and harness them in next morning with equanimity; while Christopher would expend himself in misery if one of them came in more tired than usual; and if the same animal had to do a hard day's work on the top of that, he would sometimes keep all his bread from breakfast to give it before it started —not that a slice of bread would much assist the four tired legs of a tired horse, but it comforted Christopher's little human heart, and that was something.

It was one Bank Holiday that the boy nearly broke his heart over one of the horses.

Jessica was very old, and had of late been shewing signs of failing; a hard day's work brought her back dead lame, and she was ordered complete rest for a time. But on Bank Holiday the demand for horses and vehicles at the mews was very great; every animal with four legs at all was under orders, and every vehicle that could boast of wheels had to turn out.

Jessica was no exception; out she must go. Christopher pleaded in vain. It was but poor consolation that John the hostler was to drive her.

"John, don't let her go very far," said the boy, as the hostler was brushing down the old mare.

"Must go where I'm ordered," answered John.

"Where is that?" asked the boy, eagerly.

"Start at ten, drive a party to Kempton Park, and wait their pleasure," remarked John, briefly.

"Kempton Park! Why, that's miles and miles away! *Jessica* will never do it. John, dear John, do ask Mr. Stanley to change, and send *Royal Tom* to Kempton Park."

"Mind your own business, Johnny," said the hostler. "I don't want to lose my place, and I knows better

than to interfere with my master's plans. *Jessica* 'll go all right. Perhaps you'd like to drive her yerself," he added, a little sarcastically.

The boy's eyes glowed.

"Shouldn't I just!" he cried, half below his breath.

"Then yer not goin' to," said John, not unkindly. "You'll see her come in fit as fit to-night. Get the rubber and just polish the collar-buckle and this off-side winker, there's a good boy, and leave fretting yerself about what can't be helped."

A few minutes later John drove *Jessica* in a somewhat antiquated open landau out of the yard.

As soon as they had gone Christopher ran up to his mother.

"Mother, shan't us take a holiday to-day?" he said. "You haven't no work to do."

"No work to do!" answered his mother. "The day hasn't come round yet that has found me with no work to do; but what do you want to do?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Christopher, vaguely. "Shall us go off to Kempton Park?"

"Kempton Park!" cried his mother, in dismay. "Christopher, what do *you* know of Kempton Park?"

Christopher got rather red, and said nothing.

"It's a wicked place where horse-racing goes on," continued his mother. "And they bet and gamble, I've heard say, something dreadful. What do you know about Kempton Park?"

Christopher knew next to nothing. He only knew that the old mare *Jessica* was taking a party there, and he thought he would like to know she had got there all right and was comfortably stabled.

Now he saw worse motives were attributed to him, so he only defended himself by saying meekly,—

"*Jessica* is gone there, and I thought I should like to see how she was getting on."

"*Jessica* and fiddlesticks!" cried his mother. "And you would drag me, tired as I am—far more tired than *Jessica*—all the way to Kempton Park to see that old horse! Christopher, I tell you what it is, you shall not go into that beastly mews any more. You are growing too silly. George said *Jessica* was to be shot at the end of the season, and a good job too."

"*Jessica* shot!" cried the boy, as if he could not have heard aright. "Mother, *what* did you say?"

"Yes, *Jessica* shot," answered his mother, indifferently.

Christopher turned white.

"Mother, don't let them do it," he said, pitifully.

"What does it matter?" she answered. Then, catching sight of the boy's sorrow-laden face, she drew him to her.

"Christie," she said, "I can't *bear* you taking so terrible to the horses. You think of nothing else, and you know I don't like it for you. I want you to be a scholar like Uncle David, not a hostler. You're not cut out for a hostler; you'll be small and light, never big enough and strong enough to manage these great brutes in the yard below. They want a great strong man to pull *them* about. Give it up, Christie, and take to scholaring."

The boy's face worked. He knew he *was* just cut out for the stables, and that even now his light little hand could hold those "great brutes in the yard below." His mother was looking pitifully at him.

"Christie, give it up," she pleaded.

Christopher had a keen sense of honour. He would not promise where he could not fulfil.

"Mother, I can't," he said, in a broken voice.

"Just as I thought," said his mother, half pushing him from her. "You are fonder of *Jessica* and these brutes down there than of your own mother. You take it to heart dreadful that *Jessica* is to be shot. I don't believe you would care a brass farthing if

I was to be shot." She uttered the last words in a tragic tone as she pictured herself standing beside *Jessica* to be shot because she could no longer work.

But Christopher saw the ludicrous side of the question, and, with tears springing to his eyes, he began to laugh.

"There, I said you didn't care," cried his mother; "and to think that *I* should have a child without a heart."

"Mother! mother!" cried Christopher, "don't say these things. I will—I will *try* to be a scholar!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE END OF THE OLD MARE.

THE boy took down his cap and went out. He passed through the empty mews, taking just one look on the way into *Jessica's* empty stall. He could not get the words out of his head, "*Jessica* to be shot."

He took off his coat, and taking the fork down from the nail he turned over the bed of straw, plaiting the edge neatly.

"There, *Jessica* shall find a comfortable bed, anyhow, when she comes back to-night; she will be *very* tired."

Then he went out into the road and began playing pitch-and-toss with another boy.

Still all day long his mind was full of *Jessica.*

"Now she has got to Kempton Park," he said to himself. "Now John is putting her up, I hope, in a nice stable. Now they ought to be starting home again."

He sat up with his mother till his father and brothers should come in. They were always late on Bank Holiday, and came in very tired. But at nine o'clock none of the horses had come in, and Christopher had to go to bed. His room was immediately over one of the stalls, and he could hear every sound distinctly underneath; but it was the stall of *Royal Tom,* a horse that was not his particular favourite. How he wished he slept over *Jessica!* Then he could have crept down the ladder that led into the yard, and just satisfied himself she was all right.

He lay awake a long time listening to every sound, jumping up and looking out of the window as one by one the men drove back. There was *Royal Tom* safely in, *Victoria* was in, *Champion Bill* was in; his father and George had returned, Mr. Stanley himself was back, but he could see or hear nothing of hostler John and *Jessica.*

He heard his father come up to bed. Then he fell asleep, but only to wake up by the sound of voices talking rather loudly below.

"Both knees cut!" "When?" "How did you get her home?" "I reckon you'll catch it for this, John!" "Not fit to go out!"

Such stray sentences fell on Christopher's ear. He must know what was the matter. He must satisfy himself, anyhow, that it was not *Jessica*. He crept out of bed, and passing quietly through the room in which his father and mother slept he descended the ladder into the courtyard. He saw George standing with a little knot of men, and in one moment he caught sight of *Jessica*, her head hanging down, her nostrils dilated, while every vein stood out like a rope, and the perspiration poured off her.

"George," cried the boy, "John, what has happened?"

George gave a start as he caught sight of Christopher in his night-shirt with bare feet, his face scared and white by the dull, yellow gaslight.

"*Jessica* has come down, that's all," said George, with indifference; "nothing to be so scared at, Johnny. Go back to bed; you'll do no good here."

But before he had finished speaking Christopher was at *Jessica's* head, stroking down her nose, while the old horse dropped its tired head lower and lower into the child's hands.

"There, get her in; don't stand jabbering here all night," said John the hostler, who was in the worst temper Christopher had ever seen.

"Johnny, you get up to bed. You're enough to give any one the nightmare. *Jessica's* all right."

"*Jessica isn't* all right!" cried the boy, indignantly.

His teeth were chattering with the cool evening air and the excitement of the scene. He could not trust himself to speak more. The sight of the mare's cut and bleeding knees turned him sick. He turned away as *Jessica* was led to her stall, and George picked him up and carried him upstairs. Then he crept through the big bedroom to his own little bed, where he buried his head under the bedclothes in an agony of grief.

Next morning he overslept himself, and found they had all finished breakfast before he was dressed. He daren't ask after *Jessica* before his mother, fearing lest she should be angry with him for his little escapade of the night before. He knew he could trust George not to tell of him; but he must catch George and find out more about *Jessica* before he went to school.

Then he meant to turn over a new leaf. He would try not to be so much in the mews once he knew *Jessica* was getting all right. He had promised his mother to try and be a scholar, and so he would. Yes, he would try to be a scholar. But, alas! for his resolutions. He ate his breakfast in a terrific

hurry, and managed to pocket unseen two bits of sugar and a piece of bread. His father had gone out and his mother said nothing—indeed, knew nothing of the accident to *Jessica*. So, having eaten a hurried breakfast, he took his books and rushed downstairs. He found George busy with *Royal Tom* in the stall below.

"Where are you going, Johnny?" George cried as the boy ran past.

"Just to see *Jessica*," he answered, impatiently.

"You can't," cried George, darting out and seizing hold of him.

"Can't! Why not? I *must*, George," cried the boy, struggling to get free. "I have some sugar for her."

"You will be late for school. Get along quickly," cried his brother, still holding him.

Christopher was angry.

"Let me go, I say, George. I shan't be a second. Let me go. *You* will make me late for school."

"Johnny, you cannot go; I shall not let you."

"Then tell me why, George. Tell me why, or I *will* go, I tell you."

George remembered the little, white-shirted figure standing shivering in the courtyard the night before, stroking the nose of the old, tired, broken-kneed

mare, and he felt he would rather *not* have been the one to tell Christopher the fate of the old horse. But he could not hold the frantic, struggling boy any longer.

He saw clearly enough that Christopher had better not see his old favourite again, and his father had said to him on the way downstairs, "Keep Johnny out of the mews to-day," even though he knew nothing of the night's excitement, nor had he heard the soft footsteps creeping through his room.

So George only held his ground for a moment. Then he said slowly,—

"*Jessica* was shot early this morning."

CHAPTER V.

FAILURE.

CHRISTOPHER was late for school, a bad beginning for the would-be scholar!

Everything seemed blurred before his eyes. Everything he read, or wrote, or learned, seemed summed up in the cruel words, "*Jessica* was shot early this morning." He could think of nothing else. Poor, faithful *Jessica!* And there was the bread in his pocket—yes, and there the sodden sugar that he had rescued from his tea for her.

He could remember none of his lessons, and the master more than once remarked on his extreme stupidity.

He was naturally one of the brightest boys in the class.

"Hodges, what is the matter this morning?" he cried at last, when Christopher had stumbled for the third time over a word he knew quite well. Christopher looked up vacantly. Then all his resolutions to be

a scholar broke down, and he laid down his head on the desk with the one cry,—

"It's *Jessica.*"

"And who may *Jessica* be?" asked his master, while the boys tittered around him, and he heard murmured suggestions.

"It's Hodges' sweetheart."

"It's Hodges' sister."

"And who may *Jessica* be?" repeated his master.

"It's the old mare, please, sir," sobbed Christopher.

At these words the whole class burst into such hearty peals of laughter that Christopher looked up in bewilderment.

A smile lurked over the face of the master; but, seeing the boy was in genuine trouble, he called the class to order, and passed on to the next boy. However, the fact that he had become a laughing-stock to the class soon brought Christopher to his senses, and he got through the rest of the morning better.

To speak to John the hostler was the one object of his life, and to hear the whole history of the expedition to Kempton Park.

Fortunately enough he met John outside the mews, and they were soon deep in conversation.

"But, John, did she get there all right? Wasn't she very tired?" asked the boy, eagerly.

John was more communicative to-day, now the storm had passed over, and he knew that he wasn't going to "get the sack" for what was not his fault.

"Got there right enough, bless you. A bit slow near the end, but *Jessie* was always one to go till she dropped. Plenty of cheek about her always; never-say-die sort she were. Yes, took the party along nice, she did; and got there in good time for the first race two o'clock sharp. They had all got money on it, and I was keen on putting a fiver on, being a bit hard up at home."

"But *Jessica*," said the boy. "Where did you put her up, and what did she eat, John?"

"Odds were six to one against *Cheshire Boy;* but I had seen him run, bless you, afore, and won money on him, what's more, and I backed him. I heard my party discussin' it behind, as I drove 'em along; and they nearly made me change my mind on her. They were all for backing *Wigwam*, but I sticks to my own judgment, and I'm the richer man for it to-day. A good enough race, too. *Spider* cut out the work, followed by *Chief* and *Wigwam*, with *Brown Maid* next for a quarter of a mile, when

Wigwam took up the running, followed by *Chief* and *Spider*. A quarter of a mile from home *Cheshire Boy* pulled his way to the front, having had the race in hand, as I saw, from the very commencement. He won by a length and a half, a head divided second and third, and *Wigwam* was fourth."

John jingled some money in his pocket.

"That was good enough for me, six to one, and I spotted the right horse. A nice bit of money into my pocket, and easy enough to earn. Then there was the next race at—"

But Christopher did not so much care for these racing details. He wanted to hear more of *Jessica*. At last John rambled on to the homeward journey. His party was disappointed in their day; they had emptied their pockets instead of filling them, as John had done.

"But then they know'd less than nothing about a horse," said John at intervals.

"Well, *Jessie* didn't seem not quite so fit coming along home again. She stumbled now and again, though once, when the Kempton Park coach came along soundin' the horn right in *Jessica's* ears, she pricked up and near bolted out of all my holding of her. But some five miles along the road, just

where you turns down to the 'Knights Templars' there, wi'out note or warning, down she came—down as hard as ever I see'd a horse come down in my life. 'There's *Jessica* done for at last,' sez I to myself. And, true enough, there was her knees bust right through, and—"

"Oh! don't tell me how," cried Christopher, in distress. "How did you get her home—just tell me that?"

"You'd scarce know how I did get her home," continued John. "I got and bathed her a bit; but stiff, bless you! she grew so stiff, it didn't seem as I should ever get her along. The party got out when I came along by Teddington, and then I took her out and led her along. I dursn't put her up nowhere for fear she should get worse. But I wasn't too certain what Stanley 'ud say; but he took it well enough. 'Shoot her, John,' he sez, 'she's not worth her keep no longer.' So early this morning I goes and gets—"

But Christopher was gone. He knew all he wanted to know, and to hear John's account of the end was more than he could stand.

He could not eat his dinner, and his mother, remarking that he looked white, settled in her own

mind, and announced the interesting fact to the family, that a magnesia dose would set him to rights.

Well for us if a magnesia dose cured all the sorrows of the mind!

George was man enough to hold his peace, and Christopher submitted to the magnesia dose rather than confess what was the matter.

"Perhaps you had better stay from school to-morrow," said his mother, as she tucked him up for the night.

"No, mother," answered the boy, with an overwhelming consciousness of his failure that morning. "I must go to school to-morrow. I—I am going to be a scholar, you know."

CHAPTER VI.

HIS FIRST SWEEPSTAKES.

BUT a mother's fondest dreams are seldom realised, and Mrs. Hodges was doomed to disappointment. Christopher was steady, regular, industrious, but he was no scholar. His heart was not in it, and when he was twelve years old it became evident that he must seek employment in other channels.

His mother had been ailing all the winter, often unable to go to work; so when Christopher had passed his fifth standard she made up her mind to take him away, and set him to earn something. For the first week nothing turned up, and Christopher spent his time as usual in the mews.

Times had been slack even there; several horses had been sold and several hands turned away, among them George and Thomas. Mrs. Hodges was somewhat relieved at this, and hoped they would get themselves into some "respectable business," and give up mews life. But again she was doomed to dis-

appointment, for no "respectable business" seemed forthcoming. So it came to pass that, when the newspaper establishment at the corner advertised for a "smart youth" to carry round the papers, and help in the shop, Christopher, after extreme pressure from Mrs. Hodges, applied for the post, and got it.

The very next day—oh, the irony of fate!—Mr. Stanley called on Mrs. Hodges, and, unfortunately, Christopher was in.

"Mrs. Hodges," he said, "I hear from John your lad here would like a post in the mews. He's as handy a chap about a horse as I have ever seen, and I should like to have him, seeing he lives so handy too."

Mrs. Hodges looked exceedingly surprised.

"Thank you, Mr. Stanley,' she said, drawing herself up. "Christopher has already got a most respectable post in Mr. Ready's establishment; and, had he not got this comfortable position, I would sooner starve than see him an under-hostler at your mews!"

It was Mr. Stanley's turn to look astonished.

He looked first at Mrs. Hodges, then at Christopher. The boy's eyes were gleaming with excitement.

"Oh, mother!" he almost gasped.

"Christopher, be quiet.—Your hostler has been wrongly informed, Mr. Stanley. I don't know, or wish to know, what Christopher has been talking about down there. It is against my wishes he ever goes there."

Christopher settled back again into a position of calm despair. He remembered the conversation with John which had led to this visit. John was most anxious to have him working in the mews, and John had reasons.

Mr. Stanley rose to go.

"If ever you feel inclined to change your mind, Mrs. Hodges, you will let me know. It isn't often a boy shows such strong inclination for stable-work; and it is not always well to thwart it," he added, in a lower tone.

"Good-morning, Mr. Stanley. You can put Christopher entirely out of your mind—I shall *never* let him go into your mews," replied Mrs. Hodges, loftily.

The interview was ended—and not too pleasantly either.

But the cloud that had passed over the boy years before passed over him now heavily, darkly. All possible pleasure in life seemed gone, and for ever. He hated the idea of carrying papers round from morn-

ing till night; the work was so dead, so dull, compared to the living interest of the horses. Oh, why was his mother so set against mews life? She should not have brought him there, and thrown him into the midst of it, if she had not expected him to love it; surely it was a good enough life for a boy in his position. He could earn six shillings a week there, with extra pay for extra hours; and he was only to get about two shillings and sixpence at the newspapers. He fretted and chafed against the fate that kept from him his heart's desire.

"The idea of his coming like that!" said Mrs. Hodges indignantly, after Mr. Stanley had gone.

"I think it was very kind of him," said Christopher.

"Kind! Where's the kindness?" cried Mrs. Hodges.

"A fellow doesn't get an opening like that every day, mother," said the boy, exasperated. "There's a chance of rising in that line and getting yourself a respectable livin'. I could get on to be a coachman in time; and in the newspaper line what am I goin' to do in a year or two?"

"Christie, don't worry me like this," said Mrs. Hodges, peevishly; "you'll worry me into my grave, always fretting on like this. I've been disappointed

in you once. You could have been a scholar if you had worked, and not spent all your spare time with these brutes and beasts, always kicking and stamping about below. Now—"

The boy's eyes flashed.

"Mother, it isn't true," he cried. "If you only knew how I had tried. I did indeed, I did; but I wasn't clever enough at my books. It wasn't that I didn't work. I only helped in the mews instead of playing in the streets."

"Christie, it's no good talking now," said Mrs. Hodges. "You are engaged to Mr. Ready for his newspapers, and there it is. If you're a good boy you'll soon get on; but you'll worry me into my grave if you keep fidgeting on about the mews;" and Mrs. Hodges closed her eyes, and leaned back in her chair.

She looked ill indeed. But Christopher was angry. He got up, took down his cap, and went out of the room, shutting the door noisily behind him.

The first person he stumbled on was John.

"Well, Johnny, has the guv'nor been?" he asked.

"Yes, worse luck," muttered Christopher.

"No go?" asked John.

"No go," answered Christopher, sulkily.

"We shall be busy, too; Epsom on next Tuesday, and a party to take every day. Look here, Johnny, you're down on yer luck, and disappointed—go halves in a sweepstake with me. You know my luck. Well, they've got a sweepstake on at the 'Bull and Horns;' you put in a shilling, I put in a shilling. If you win, we go shares; if I win, we go shares. What do you say?"

Christopher's face brightened.

"I wish you could have come down along with me one of the days, then you'd see what a horse was like. I shall lay my money on *Dancing Boy* if I win the sweepstakes first day; I knows him well. And look here, Johnny, if we win in the sweepstakes I don't mind laying on something for you if you can't get down anyhow."

To the dejected Christopher this sounded like life indeed. He wanted money, too. His mother wanted soups and jellies, the doctor had said. He had been cross to her, and he would put into John's sweepstakes, and if he won—and to the boy's mind this was a dead certainty—then he could give her all she wanted, and he could put some money on to John's favourite.

"Is *Dancing Boy* the favourite all round?" asked Christopher.

John hesitated. "Odds are ten to one on her," he answered. "Will you give me your shilling for the sweepstakes to-night?"

Christopher looked rather aghast.

"Do you want it to-night, John?" he asked, apprehensively.

"I was going to slip round to the 'Bull and Horns' for a minute or two," answered John; "we shall be busy to-morrow."

"I haven't got a shilling on me just now," said Christopher. Then, as a feeling crept over him that perhaps his mother would not like his doing it, he added, "Perhaps, John, I will wait for another chance."

"Another chance!" said John, "they don't turn up like this every day. Never mind, Johnny, I'll manage it for you. Good-night."

And John was gone.

Christopher did not feel quite comfortable about it. But then he argued with himself that he had vexed his mother very much, and if he could get her some soups and jellies, and nourishing foods, it would not matter so much. And, besides, he could trust John to keep it quiet.

Only *how* he wished he could go to Epsom just for once to see what it was all like!

Instead of which he must carry round newspapers all day, and eat his heart out with longing to be about the horses!

CHAPTER VII.

SOMETHING MORE PRECIOUS THAN GOLD AND SILVER.

SO, with a heavy heart and a somewhat rebellious spirit, Christopher carried round his newspapers. His mother was growing worse, and the best nourishment was ordered her. Christopher suffered pangs of remorse when he thought of how he had behaved to her. One evening—he had just received his first earnings, and was on the way home with them—he came across John the hostler.

"Well," said John, "you're just the customer I wanted, Johnny. How about that shilling for the sweepstake?"

Christopher put his hand into his pocket and slowly drew out his shilling. John looked relieved.

"That's right," he said, cheerfully. "We go shares, mind, if we win; and it's only a shilling gone if we lose."

"When shall we know the result?" asked Chris-

topher under his breath, for he saw George coming down the street at that moment.

"Tuesday night," whispered John. "Meet me here, or come down into *Peter Paul's* stall, and I'll tell you."

"All right," whispered Christopher.

But something said to him, "It is *not* all right."

George joined him before he had time to consider what he should say about the missing shilling, for his mother knew what wages he was to get, and would expect it all.

"I say, Johnny," said George, as he joined his little step-brother, "I wouldn't be for ever about with John. He's all very well, but—"

"All very well!" exclaimed Christopher, "why, he's been my friend ever since I was born, and he tells me how the mews is getting on, and—"

Then a sudden, happy thought struck him.

"George," he said, as casually as he could, "can you lend me a shilling?"

"A shilling, Johnny! What for?" he asked, somewhat surprised, for he knew the boy must have received his money that day.

"Why, I've lent some one a shilling, and I don't want to bother mother as she's ill," said Chris-

topher. "I'll pay you back next week all right enough."

"Bless you, Johnny, I'll lend you a shilling quick enough. But you're sure it's all right—you haven't lent it to—to John, have you, Johnny?"

Christopher turned away his face.

"What does it matter whom I have lent it to?" he said, quickly. "I am doing it for mother's sake," he argued to himself; "it can't be so very wrong."

George handed him the shilling in silence, and they went upstairs together.

Mrs. Hodges was very prostrate; great weakness, the doctor called it. Plenty of port wine and beef-tea would pull her round; but she must have plenty. She looked up as the boys came in.

"Found no work, George?" she said, fretfully.

"No," he answered, shortly.

"But see here, mother," cried Christopher, as he jingled the money in his pocket; "now we'll get you port wine and beef-tea."

He counted out his money in triumph, and laid it on the table.

"Much port wine *that* will get," moaned Mrs. Hodges. "Besides, Christopher, you must have a new pair of boots; these let the wet through. And now

George and Thomas are both out of work, you must buy your own."

Christopher was disappointed, but a sudden glow spread over his face as he remembered the sweepstakes. "Tuesday night," he said to himself, "only three more days."

Tuesday night came. Christopher read the account of the first race-day in the evening papers; but he did not know the horses, and *Dancing Boy* was not running, so they were but names till John came back from Epsom.

But in vain he waited and waited. John did not come back, and Christopher had to go in lest he should excite suspicion.

Early next morning he found his way into *Peter Paul's* stall. There was John rubbing him down.

"Good luck, Johnny," he said, his broad face beaming with great satisfaction. "You're the man; you've drawn the winner! There's thirty shillings down, and as we went shares, I hand you over fifteen shillings; and losing one to start, you're fourteen shillings to the good. Hey, man, what do you think of that?—money well earned, isn't it?" And John rubbed his horse merrily down.

"Now, look here, Johnny, you keep, say, nine

shillings of that, and let me put five shillings on *Dancing Boy* for you to-day. May as well double it again as not."

Christopher was too excited and delighted to care much.

"All right, John," he said, patting *Peter Paul* on the neck. "How much do you want? You take five shillings and put it on *Dancing Boy*, and I'll look out in the evening paper and see how the racing goes. Nine shillings to the good!—no, its none so dusty."

And Christopher crept quietly out of the forbidden mews with his money in his pocket.

Still an uneasy feeling pursued him at his work. Why, if it was all right, as he said to himself, why didn't he feel inclined to take it straight to his mother or his father, and tell them how he came by it? Because, to tell the truth, he was not *quite* sure how he did come by it—because, he said to himself, they would not understand about it. He would go and buy the things his mother wanted and take them home with him.

No, that would not do, either. She would want to know how he got them, and where the money came from. O Christopher, Christopher, give the money

back. It is built up of hardly-earned shillings; it is taken from those who cannot afford it. Give the money back, and wash your hands of such a business. There are things more precious than gold and silver. You are hardening your boy's true heart; you are deadening your boy's best feelings; you are soiling your boy's clear conscience. What are a few paltry shillings compared to these?

Go and earn honest money with honest work.

Infinitely more precious is your boyhood's honour!

But Christopher spent his day, while carrying round his papers, in puzzling his brains as to how he should satisfactorily account for the money that had suddenly come into his possession.

The more he thought about it, the more utterly puzzling it grew. He would not tell a lie. He did not wish to tell a lie; and it did not enter his busy brain that he was *acting* one.

Nevertheless he felt very proud as he went to the shop, and laid out some of his money in tempting things for his mother, and yet more proud as he carried them home for her and laid them down on the table.

"There, mother," he said, laying down the parcels one by one—"now you'll soon be well."

Mrs. Hodges looked up in astonishment.

"Christie," she said, "O Christie, who gave you all these things?"

"No one," answered Christopher. "I bought them with my own money."

"Your own money, Christie! But how did you get it?—has Mr. Ready raised you already?"

"No," answered Christopher, growing, nevertheless, a little hot under this persistent fire. "I earned some extra and got you these things. That's enough, isn't it?"

George looked up in bewilderment. True, Christopher had returned him the lent shilling. But what was the boy doing?—how was he earning this money? Then the vision of John the hostler standing at the mews corner in deep conversation with his little brother rose before George. He fidgeted uneasily, but he held his peace.

CHAPTER VIII.

ENTANGLED.

THE next day Christopher looked out eagerly for the evening papers, for he would learn by them sooner than from John the result of the second day's racing. No sooner were they received, folded, and he was started out on his rounds, than he darted round the first corner and quickly unfolded a paper. The first thing that caught his eye was, amid the sporting news, "Victory of *Dancing Boy*." He read no more. His eyes danced, and he almost ran with his papers in order to get done the sooner, so that he might await John on his return.

Dancing Boy had won, and John was laying on five shillings for him when the odds were ten to one against him. He reckoned it up. Yes, he ought to get two pounds ten shillings down, brought him back by John. And he could get more things for his mother.

He found time, before going for his papers, to see John, who indeed, was on the lookout for him.

"Won again, Johnny!" he cried; "two pounds ten shillings this time. I knows a good horse when I sees him. Look 'ere," he added, jingling the coin in his pocket. "Here you are, Johnny."

Christopher took the money eagerly, and was just going off with it when John called him back.

"I say, Johnny," he said, "of course you and me are friends, but when a friend does a job like that, and wins a fellow a bit of money just by his judgment of a horse, it is customary, Johnny, just to give him something for his trouble, d'you see?"

Christopher got a little confused.

"O John, I am so sorry not to have thought of it; how much shall I give you?"

"I leaves that to you, Johnny. Do just as you please."

Christopher put some odd silver into the hostler's hand and went his way.

But somehow the transaction did not give him satisfaction. Was it all right? Why did John, his friend, demand payment?

Still he had enough, and more than enough, for himself. It was a grand way of getting money this, and he owed it all to John, too. But why should he put his money on through John now? Oh, how he

longed to go to the races himself. He felt sure he should make some money there.

The craze to get money was full upon him. He thought about it by day, he dreamt about it by night. But to go and see the races!—to judge for himself. He must, he must.

His ingenious brain set to work. The question was, how could he get the papers taken round that day, and what excuse could he make at home, for he had the uncomfortable feeling that his mother would not hear of it if he laid the case before her.

The races were on the following Wednesday. This was Saturday.

He bought his mother some jelly and a chicken, and brought them back in glee.

"O Christie, you must not spend your money all on me," she said half triumphantly, as he laid down the things before her. "You must save for a new coat against the winter. Oh, but I thank God for such a good son," she added, looking hard at George, who sat disconsolately enough in the rocking-chair, staring vacantly at Christopher and his parcels. Suddenly his look changed into one of the fullest meaning.

"Johnny," he said, hardly, "where did you get that money?"

Christopher flushed up hotly.

"And what business is that of yours?" he retorted. "*You* don't earn enough to get mother the nourishing things she needs!"

A look of deep pain passed over George's freckled face. It was on the tip of his tongue to say something very sharp to Christopher. Indeed, he did say enough to call down a reproof from Mrs. Hodges.

"You're always down on Christopher, George," she moaned. "It's only because *you* can't earn money."

George said nothing. He only got up and left the room. It was an unjust accusation, and he writhed under it. He cared for the little brother—cared for him desperately, unselfishly; so much so, that he seized the first opportunity of finding him alone to continue the conversation, unpleasant though it was. He couldn't help feeling something was wrong, for Christopher did not fire up easily about nothing.

He laid wait for him the following day in the mews, whither he felt prétty sure he should catch him going to help John with the horses on Sunday afternoon.

"Johnny," he said, catching him by the sleeve as he crushed by him, "Johnny, I can't help it, but where did you get that money?"

Christopher was very vexed. What right had George to question his conduct when his mother looked over everything—believed it honestly earned?

"Why do you want to know?" asked Christopher, angrily. "Do you want some of it?"

This was adding insult to injury.

"Want some!" cried George. "I wouldn't touch it."

"Do you think I have stolen it?" cried Christopher. "I tell you I earned it in fair-play. There, will that do?" he said, trying to pass on.

"Yes, that *will* do," said George. "But, Johnny, take care, it may not always be fair-play. Come for a walk with me; we'll go right up on the Heath. Don't go and spend the afternoon in the mews.

But Christopher passed on.

"I promised to lend a hand to John," he said. "I'll come another day."

So George left him, and went for his walk alone. He was not satisfied about Christopher, but he saw talking would do no good. After all, why should he care? He was not responsible for his brother. Let him gamble, and play, and bet, he would be punished in due season. Why did he put himself out about him? The answer was plain: because he loved him. And to see those we love doing wrong is one

of the hardest things to bear, especially when we stretch out a helping hand, as George had done, to try to save before it is too late. George thought very deeply that Sunday afternoon, but arrived at no conclusions. It was not till Monday night that he overheard a conversation that made him resolve on his course of action. He had been looking for work all day, and was returning, tired and hopeless, rather late.

"Then you'll be here to-morrow morning." He recognised Christopher's voice. "Then I'll show you where to leave the papers, and you'll do it alone Wednesday night."

"All right," said a voice, which George recognised as that of the hostler's son Charlie. "I'll be here, Johnny."

"And see, I'll pay you well, Charlie. Good-night. Be sure you meet me all right."

George walked on. He sat opposite Christopher at dinner, but he said nothing.

"How is he going to manage?" thought George. "And what shall I do?"

Christopher had thought it all out. His natural passion for horses, his newly-developed passion for money, were getting the better of him.

Wednesday morning came, and Christopher was

going off at the usual time when he turned back and said as casually as he could,—

"I may be a little late to-night, mother. There's a run on the evening papers at race-meeting times."

Then George put two and two together. There was no longer any doubt about it. Christopher was going to the races!

CHAPTER IX.

THE RACE MEETING.

GEORGE sat still in mute bewilderment. What should he, could he, do? Open his mother's eyes? No, she would not believe him. Run after Christopher and argue with him? Useless, worse than useless. Sit still and leave the boy alone? That he *could* not do, because he loved him.

"Aren't you going out to look for work, George?" said Mrs. Hodges, peevishly, as George seemed disinclined to move.

The words stung him into action. He got up quickly and left the room. There was no love, no understanding, between George and his step-mother. If she had loved him as she loved Christopher, wouldn't his life have been different?

But George was a plain, silent, rough-looking creature, and it was grievance enough that he had to be fed and kept, contributing but little to the family fund. Christopher carried round his morning

papers in double-quick time. He was very excited, for John had at last persuaded him to go to the races, and see for himself what a fine life it was; had persuaded him to bring his money, and to double and treble it, till Christopher's mind had jumped to the wholesale conclusion that he should return a millionaire at the very least!

They had arranged every detail. John's boy Charlie would take Christopher's place.

"There's no harm in that," said John. "I shouldn't say nothink much about it at home, as you say Mrs. Hodges is taken so poorly. People have got wrong ideas about racecourses; she'd think you was in bad company, instead of the very best," said John, drawing himself up with evident pride; "and as to money, she's ready enough to eat the good things you gets her, Johnny. And where would she be without them, I wonder. It's me you have to thank for that."

So, in the light of these attractive arguments, Christopher decided to go. John had to drive, so Christopher was to go down by train and meet him at a particular time on the course. He hired a very tidy, not to say smart, suit of clothes for the day, and a new hat, for John said he would do better

if he looked thoroughly respectable. His gambling earnings, which by this time amounted to some four pounds, were tied up in one of the corners of his handkerchief.

He felt very proud, if his conscience was not too comfortable, as he took the train for Esher, and found himself rushing past the cool, green fields and wooded tangles. The train was very full, and Christopher knew a good deal about the coming races before he arrived at his destination. He soon discovered John, who was on the lookout for him. John was proud of his superior knowledge of the ways of a racecourse, and proud of showing Christopher round, for he was genuinely fond of the boy, and in his heart of hearts never intended to lead him into trouble, unless it might be in self-defence.

He was evidently a well-known figure at race-meetings, and many a salute did he get from respectable-looking men, and yet more from a class of beings who looked anything but respectable!

"Come into the paddock, Johnny, and I'll show you the horse to back. He's in for the Maddox Plate."

John worked his way through the crowds standing about the paddock.

"There he is, *Blue Rover;* he happens to be the favourite, though I've had my eye on him ever so long. There you are, Johnny; put your money on him, boy, and I'll bet you won't lose."

Christopher obeyed John, put his money on, and won as usual.

Elated with his success he betted more freely; again and yet again he won.

The boy's eyes were sparkling with eagerness and excitement. This was something like, this was winning indeed; this was life! He lunched with John; indeed, he treated John, and they indulged in quite as much drink as was good for them. Christopher was not accustomed to beer, and it excited him strongly.

It was the last race. He was growing reckless.

"I shall back *Lord Tom,*" he cried, excitedly.

"No, no," said John, "don't be an ass, Johnny; he's not going to win. *Irish Bob* is the favourite; put your money on him, lad. Come, see him in the paddock. Look at the odds. Don't be a fool."

"I'm not going to be tied to your apron-string, John," cried the boy, wildly. "I know a horse as well as you do. I can win as well as you."

"Well done, young rascal!" cried several men round the betting book.

"The independence of the boy!" cried another.

"Go it, young 'un; put your money on," said another voice.

And Christopher did. He hardly knew what he was doing in the heat and excitement of the moment; but he laid his money on *Lord Tom*, and more than his money, too. If he won, he was a made man; if he lost—if, if! He wavered for one instant, while the crowd surged and talked around him.

"Put your money on; now it's your turn, man," he heard a voice beside him; "you stand to win or lose."

Suddenly an arm clutched Christopher with an iron grip, and a face looked straight into his, while a hoarse voice whispered,—

"Stop, Christie, stop; for God's sake come away!"

Christopher started, and his flushed face grew white as death as he looked away from the face he recognized as that of his brother George.

Then he recovered himself, the colour came back to his face, and he pushed George aside.

"It's no business of yours what I do," he cried roughly, flushing with anger, and shaking off the

strong arm that still held him firmly. "Leave me alone. Go and earn some money yourself."

"Leave him alone," cried John, angrily; "he's got the pluck of fifty. He knows what he's about."

And taking hold of George he swung him away, and he was soon lost among the crowd.

George was heavy at heart.

He had with difficulty made his way down to Sandown, just to see that no harm came to Christopher—just to see for himself that he was not being led away into trouble.

And here he had found him amid rough, gambling friends at the betting-book, strangely excited, deaf to the voice of reason.

"Oh my God!" he murmured, as he turned miserably away from the crowd, "save the boy from ruin."

CHAPTER X.

RUINED.

CHRISTOPHER stood in the front of the ring quivering with excitement as the horses trotted past to the starting-post.

"Shouldn't wonder if you made on *Lord Tom*," said John; "but I feel safer with *Irish Bob*, and I can't afford to lose."

Now they were getting into line, now the flag had dropped, and the word "Go" reached Christopher's eager ears. He could not stand still; he shouted till he was hoarse.

Lord Tom was leading, *Sealskin* was running him hard, *Irish Bob* was some seven lengths behind, while two others were running neck and neck behind.

"*Lord Tom* wins! *Sealskin* wins! green and black has it! the favourite! the favourite!"

Such cries reached Christopher's ears, while he shouted "*Lord Tom! Lord Tom!*" at the top of

his voice, while everything swam before him in a confused throng.

Suddenly *Irish Bob* took up the running, and *Sealskin* drew to the front. They were within a hundred yards of the winning-post.

"*Irish Bob*, the favourite, the favourite!" was the cry taken up and echoed on from mass to mass.

Another moment and Christopher realized that there was no longer a chance for *Lord Tom*. He had fallen back, while *Sealskin* shot ahead and won by a couple of lengths.

As the truth of what had happened dawned on Christopher, he turned ashy pale, and looked despairingly across at John.

"What have you lost?" asked John, with an attempt at cheerfulness. "Can't always win, you know."

But Christopher looked blank.

As the crowd surged away in different directions, he stood rooted to the spot, staring dumbly, piteously on to the now crowded course.

"Come along," said John, roughly, "you'll do no good standing there. You've got to pay up or—disappear. There's no choice, Johnny. Which 'll you do. You must be quick. You haven't got so

many friends about as I have, and I must go. Good-night. Don't look as if you were going to cry. You must borrow some money, if it isn't convenient to disappear just now; or, look here, Johnny, you're a friend of mine, and I'll—"

Suddenly the iron grip fastened on Christopher again, and this time a strong arm drew him away.

"It's my turn now," said an angry voice. "John, you'll have to answer for this. There's something somewhere about a 'stumbling-block in another's way.' Go, you coward, go, and be satisfied with having ruined an innocent boy!"

John did not answer.

He had been the means of having George dismissed. He did not like the looks of him now, as he stood defiant and angry, holding Christopher by the arm, and, murmuring something about getting the horses out, he disappeared.

George knew what had happened. He had heard Christopher betting; he saw the race; he saw the boy's piteous face as the race ended.

"I *will* save him now," thought the boy; "he shall not be brought lower while I can help it."

It required courage to go to Christopher again, and George had not much tact. An honest heart under

that rough exterior, a deep sense of right and wrong, a yearning love for the little brother—these were the feelings that prompted George once more to go to the rescue, if that rescue *was* late. Christopher did not speak as George silently but strongly pioneered him through the crowds toward the railway station. The boy was almost too dazed to realize what was happening.

Five pounds lost! That was the only thought that was borne in on Christopher's heated brain and bewildered mind.

And where was the money coming from?

Silence—silence. Not a word from George; not a word of condemnation or reproof, only a tight grip on his arm and a determined step.

Borne almost off their feet by the crowd, they at last found themselves in a crowded railway carriage and very rough company.

Still not a word from George, not a word from Christopher. It was growing late before they left the railway station, and their mother would be expecting them home.

Suddenly Christopher stopped.

"George," he said hoarsely, as they got into the neighbourhood of Notting Hill, "I can't go home."

George stood still without relaxing his grasp for one instant.

"Why not?" he asked, in a hard voice.

"It 'll kill mother," said Christopher.

"You mustn't tell her to-night," said George, in the same hard voice.

"But I suppose *you* will," answered Christopher, bitterly.

George winced. Was this the return for his sacrifice? Was this love's reward?

"I shall say nothing," he answered, roughly.

Then as they stood at the mews corner, he said,—

"How much do you owe?"

"Five pounds," answered Christopher, miserably.

"The money is paid," answered George, as sternly as before. "Go in now, Christopher, I shall come in later."

And without a word George turned on his heel and walked slowly off in the other direction.

It was not till then that Christopher's pride gave way, and the tender feelings that characterized his boyhood came back over him with a rush of agony. He could not tell his mother. It would kill her. And George! George! A choky sensation came over him as he thought of George, and, burying

his head in his hands, he burst into a storm of grief.

He did not know how long he sat there, a miserable little heap, sobbing his heart out, as others have done before him. But at last he rose. His head ached, his eyes felt hot and painful, his body and mind were *very* tired, his heart was very heavy. He climbed up the stairs, yet undecided what course of action to pursue. Should he tell—make a clean breast of everything? or should he deceive yet further?

Fortunately no temptation pursued him. His mother had gone to bed, his father and Thomas were not in.

With a sob of relief he went to his room. With one smothered, piteous cry, which must have found its way to a pitying heaven, he threw himself on to his bed, and from very weariness he slept.

CHAPTER XI.

REPENTANCE.

CHRISTOPHER woke next morning with a dreary sense of oppression. His head ached, but his heart ached more for the wrong he had done. He felt as if he had awakened from a horrible, long dream. But he *had* awakened; and with open eyes he saw the mischief he had done. Five pounds to be repaid, or what? Did some one say prison? Christopher shivered. Would they really come and handcuff him and carry him off? His head reeled with the thought. Oh, what had he done to come to such trouble? Little by little he realized the downward steps. It was not so much putting on the money; it was putting on more than he could afford to lose. Five pounds in debt! Surely George had told them all by this time.

He found his father and mother at breakfast with Thomas, but George's place was empty.

"You *were* late last night, Christopher," moaned his mother; "and I was so ill I had to go to bed.

And the evening papers will be late again, as those horrid races are not over yet."

Christopher looked down and did not answer. But it was evident his parents knew nothing yet, and a load seemed lifted off him.

"Where's George?" he asked, presently.

"Gone after a job, I *hope*," sighed his mother. "His bed was not slept in last night, so I suppose he has gone further afield for work. High time he did, too!"

Christopher felt very uncomfortable. He could not eat his breakfast; every mouthful seemed to choke him. But his mother was too much afflicted with her own ill-health to notice him very much, and he escaped more easily than he had ever dared to imagine.

Just beyond the mews corner stood a boy he knew, one Fred Pullen by name.

Christopher was walking on, as in a dream, when Fred stopped him.

"George wanted me to give you this very partikler," he said, holding out a piece of paper.

"Have you seen George?" asked Christopher, eagerly.

"Saw 'im about six this morning goin' toward Bayswater way," answered Fred, vaguely.

Christopher opened the paper. A few lines were scrawled almost illegibly inside, for George was no scholar, but Christopher soon made them out.

"I have paid your money with John's help. Don't go racing any more, Christie, and don't bet any more. You won't come to no good if you do. I have not told about you at home, but I have left it to you. Tell like a man, Christie, and ask father to pay up for you to John, or you will be unhappy. I am enlisting to-day. God bless you. GEORGE."

The hot colour rushed over Christopher's white face as he strode on with the paper in his hand. The money was paid, but how? Why had he gone like that? It was all so wrapt in mystery. Christopher's mind had only of late been opened to the wickedness of the world; he could believe wrong of any one now. Yet this last idea did not commend itself. George had done him a good enough turn; he was quite ready to allow it now. He could not—would not—think ill of him.

But the hardest part was to come.

"Tell like a man, Christie, or you will be unhappy."

He *was* unhappy. All day long he walked round with his newspapers as one in a dream. He dreaded

going home. He dreaded lest, somehow, his mother should have heard, and yet he felt it would be a relief, for it would save telling her. It might almost kill her in her weak state. Perhaps, after all, he had better keep it to himself. But no. "Tell like a man." The words burnt into his brain, and he thrust out his arms as if to push temptation from him.

He waited outside the door for a moment. Then, summoning all his courage together, he pushed it open and went upstairs. No one was there. The tea was laid, but untouched. He went to his mother's door. It was locked.

"Are you there, mother?" he asked in as clear a voice as he could muster, though he was trembling in every limb.

"Yes," was the smothered answer.

"Can I come in?"

"No, I will not see you, Christopher."

"Why, what has happened, mother?" he asked in distress, as the awful truth flashed before him."

"What *has* happened? You have deceived me; you have killed me. Go away."

"Mother! mother!" cried the boy, his distress becoming painful, "let me in—see me—hear me! I will tell you all. Only let me come to you."

"Let me die in peace," was the only answer, and Christopher fell down by the door, torn by sobs. Mrs. Hodges was his mother, and as a mother she loved the boy in her own way. Half overcome by curiosity to hear more, half remorseful at his evident sorrow, she dragged herself across the room and unlocked the door.

There lay Christopher in a miserable heap, his head bent over his knees, convulsed with sorrow. She looked down at him for a moment unmoved. The shock to herself on hearing the news from Charlie, who had come up to be paid, the disgrace to the Hodges family, the pains in the region of her heart brought on by the news—these monopolized her for the time being. And the little distressed heap of suffering humanity came second in all her thoughts.

"Yes, you have nearly killed me," she said, in icy tones. "And murder, added to disgrace, racing, betting, and deceiving, may get you hanged before you have done."

Christopher looked up with a face of such mute agony that the mother's heart was touched.

"Christie, Christie," she said, raising him up, "tell me what you have done; but never, never deceive me again."

She drew him into her room and shut the door. And then and there, hiding his tear-stained face in her lap, he told her the whole miserable story—told her of his first sweepstakes; his first winnings; of how he had spent it; of the temptation to go and see the horses race for himself; of his early winning, and then the final smash; of George's attempt to save him the first time, of his determination to save him the second time; and lastly, of George's paying the money, and his disappearance. When he had done, Christopher drew George's illiterate letter from his pocket and gave it to his mother.

A new light seemed to dawn on her ideas of George; something of a halo shone around his head, though at present it shone but dimly. Was this the rough, silent lad who could get no work in busy London?—was this the fellow she had abused by night and day? There was a suggestion of one of God's saints about him that did not seem to suit with his rough exterior.

"He has made something out of it, most probable," she said, half to satisfy herself that there was no occasion to show any undue gratitude to George. "There 's no understanding them sort of creatures. A bit queer at times, too, George. So he's gone to be

a soldier? Well, there's no need to think of *him* no more for a long time to come."

So said Mrs. Hodges. But Christopher thought otherwise. He had a great yearning to see George again, to tell him all, to say "Thank you" for all he had done, to wring that hard, bony hand, to look into those expressionless brown eyes. But George was gone.

CHAPTER XII.

"YOU AND ME IS FRIENDS."

DULL, monotonous, and miserable were the days that followed Christopher's downfall, rendered yet more miserable by the severe illness which entirely kept Mrs. Hodges to her bed, and which the doctor insisted was some shock to the nervous system.

Mr. Hodges had paid to John the money owing —paid it angrily; and many an imprecation, just and unjust, had Christopher to suffer from his father.

But he could bear that; angry words and impossible threats he did not mind. But to see his mother suffering through his fault, this touched him far more deeply.

Mrs. Hodges did not spare him either.

"Yes, Christopher, you *have* killed me," she told him at intervals, and her voice was very weak, truly. "As I lie here thinking, thinking, it seems like a dream that a child of mine, brought up, one may say, like a gentleman, except for that horrid mews, should

turn out so bad through *and* through. Yes, bad through *and* through, through *and* through," she murmured to herself.

And Christopher, the boy who was "bad through and through," sat by her bed every spare moment—yes, and right into the night sometimes. He was very miserable as he watched her growing worse day by day, and he implicitly believed her words to the effect that he had really killed or was killing her. It was useless to repeat that he was sorry. If Mrs. Hodges had looked into those eyes of misery, she would have read the boy's bitter repentance; could she have understood that tender heart, she would never have made his burden heavier than it was. But she did not understand; she did not see. She was too much absorbed in herself and her own afflictions to be unselfish in her love.

So the days passed on.

One day Christopher was sitting by his mother, and she had been moaning piteously for some time about her son and the wickedness of the world, when Christopher, to give a turn to the conversation, said, "Mother, you have forbidden me to speak to John, but I want to tell you I am going to speak to him *once*."

Mrs. Hodges, even in her weak condition and with her shattered nerves, jumped up in bed like lightning.

"No, Christie, no," she cried in a voice louder than had been heard for many a long day, "you shall not speak to that wicked man. I suppose you want to arrange another race-meeting, and bet away our last penny, not content with having *ruined* us!"

The exertion was great. Mrs. Hodges suddenly remembered how ill she was, and fell back groaning.

Christopher did not answer at once.

"John is my friend," he answered, simply.

"Your friend! A fine friend to have. You will please to consider him your enemy for the future."

The boy was silent, and Mrs. Hodges was silent too. At last he spoke.

"But if it's wrong for me to bet, it's wrong for John to bet, too," he said, his forehead wrinkled with the problems of life.

"John ought to know better," said Mrs. Hodges in disgust.

"But he doesn't seem to know better," argued Christopher, "and, mother, I am just going to tell him. That is all I want to say."

"I had hopes you would turn over a new leaf, Christopher—that this affair would have brought you

to your senses; but you are hopeless. Let me die in peace, and go your ways. I can do no more." And Mrs. Hodges turned her face to the wall with a moan.

But Christopher had got all the answer he expected. He slipped quietly out of the room and ran down once more to his beloved mews. He had not spoken to John since that terrible moment at Sandown when George had dragged him away. But there he was now, rubbing down his horses in the mews.

Christopher felt the colour mounting to his cheeks. He knew his father and John had had some unpleasant interviews over the money transaction, and he did not feel sure of how the hostler would receive him. He was therefore greatly relieved when John called out, "Hello, Johnny, I thought we were to be cuts now. But I'm glad to see you again."

Christopher said nothing.

"Look here, Johnny, you know 'twasn't my fault about that—that money. That's clear, isn't it?"

"Yes," answered Christopher, though a little doubtfully.

With the sight of John the love of betting and desire for money had seized him again, and he felt the temptation returning.

"Yes, that's all right, John; it isn't *that* I've come

about," said Christopher, slowly. Then he made a great effort.

"John, you and me are friends, and we've been friends all my life," began Christopher, though his life now was but sixteen years all told.

"Right you are," answered John.

"Well," continued the boy, "if it's wrong for me to bet, it's wrong for you."

It was out now, the wretched problem that had puzzled him day after day and night after night, leaving him uneasy and perplexed.

"Whew!" said John, giving a long whistle, and rubbing away yet harder at his horse.

Christopher was caressing its nose, so that John could not see his face, which was burning hot.

"I'm not in fun, John; I'm in real, dead earnest," continued the boy.

"And want me to give up betting? Ask me to give up living first!" said John with an ugly laugh.

"Then you don't think I'm wrong to do it?" asked the boy, his steadfast purpose moving slightly.

John looked confused.

"Yes—no. Well, Johnny, if your parents doesn't like it, you better stop, that's all."

"But your parents, John?" said Christopher, thinking he saw daylight for a moment.

John laughed. "Dead and buried years ago."

That argument wouldn't do.

"Look here, John, you and me is friends," began Christopher again, "and what isn't right for me isn't right for you."

"I don't see the argument," said John. "Beer's good for me, but it's not good for a boy like you; smoking's good for me, but it's no good for you boys. I'm a man and you're a boy. There's the difference, Johnny."

But Christopher was unsatisfied still. He did not see his way to contradicting John, but he could not see that his argument was altogether good. So he only held his tongue on the subject, and shortly afterwards left him. And with a heavy heart he returned to the sick-room.

He was unconsciously working out a problem that has puzzled many an old head many a time before—"How much am I bound to help my friends when I *know* they are doing wrong?"

CHAPTER XIII.

AN ACCIDENT IN THE STRAND.

SO time went on. Mrs. Hodges grew better; and the assurance that he had not really killed her lifted loads off Christopher's mind. He grew light-hearted once more, and a happier look came across his boyish face.

He threw himself heart and soul into cricket, and found himself the better for it, mind and body. It gave him the recreation he needed, it was no drain on his small earnings, and the interest was a far healthier one than he got by horse-racing. Not that he suddenly smothered his love of horses. That was impossible; he loved them still, and his one wish was to go into the stables and follow his father's profession of coachman.

But he determined, for the present, to carry round his papers and wait his time.

His mother could not live long, and he would displease her no more during her lifetime. The only

thing that weighed him down now, was that John still went racing, still won and lost, and lost and won, betted and gambled; and Christopher was powerless to argue him out of it. Could he persuade him to join the cricket club? He didn't think the captain would admit John somehow.

One day Christopher was taking round his evening papers when a paragraph struck his eye. It was the day of the Bank Holiday.

"Serious accident in the Strand."

He read the smaller print below this statement, and, for some strange reason, made up his mind the accident had happened to a man out of their mews and one of their horses. What was John driving to-day? He was sure to be out, for there was a pressure on as usual.

He could do nothing, but he felt uneasy as he hurried on with his papers.

He got home at his usual time to find Charlie, John's boy, waiting for him outside. The boy's face was white.

"Johnny," he said, in a trembling voice, "father's had an accident; 'bus run into 'un and took off 'un's wheel; horse kicked 'un, and they say 'un's done for."

"Where is he?" asked Christopher, quickly.

"They took 'un to the 'orspital, but 'un begged to be brought 'ome, and they brought 'un 'ome, and, Johnny, he says he 'ud like to see you. Can 'ee come?"

Christopher hesitated.

It was his cricket night. But John—John, his friend—was dying. He must go.

He ran upstairs to tell his mother, and then followed Charlie. Neither spoke till Christopher said,—

"Is the horse hurt?"

"Dre'fful hurt," answered Charlie; "was a real bad smash up. But the worst is," added Charlie, getting nearer to Christopher, "father's lost his money on Monday, and we ain't got none left. We was so well off last week, and we had meat for dinner every day; but this week we ain't got nothing, he said last night."

John lived in a back street at the back of the mews, and it did not take long to get there. Charlie led the way up a rickety staircase, and Christopher entered the room. There lay John on a bed in a corner of the room. His wife, with the last baby in her arms, sat beside him, and the other children were playing on the floor, hushed into silence by something unusual.

"Is that Johnny?" murmured the sick man, as

Charlie led the way. "Then, Mary girl, just clear out a moment with the young 'uns. I want to have a word with 'im."

His wife, with no change of expression, no look of love, left the room.

"Johnny," said the hostler, "I'm smashed up this time, but I want to tell 'ee one thing before I goes. Ye're right, lad, about the bettin', and I'm mortal sorry for the tricks I've played. It isn't the bettin', it's the tricks it leads 'un to. I've cheated you, Johnny, when ye was first beginning, cheated you again and again, and I'd pay ye back every farthing if I had 'em now. But I'm dying, Johnny, and I haven't got a penny in the world."

He paused a moment.

"'Tisn't all sport to leave yer wife and kids to go to the house, Johnny. You spoke to me in time, and you made me more uncomfortable than you think of; but I was gone too far, I couldn't leave it off. And now it's too late, Johnny—it's too late."

Christopher was at a loss to know what to say. It was clear the hostler had not long to live; it was clear his repentance came late in the day. Suddenly he went on again.

"This is what I want you for, Johnny. I want

you to stop the others betting their very lives away. There's more than one in the mews doin' it now—gamblin' and bettin' without going to the races; but it's worse. They does it all at the public, and knows nothin' o' what they're doing, till the money's gone. Stop it, Johnny. Yer must get a post in the mews and stop it. Tell 'em what it's brought me to, and tell 'em—tell 'em now, for God's sake, to stop in time."

He paused again. Then he seemed to wander.

"Eh, but that's a race; favourite wins. Go it, Jem; go it, yellow and black; betting, five to one against *Dancing Boy*, five to one—"

Christopher grew alarmed, and called back his wife.

"He's took funny, and thinks he's racing again," he said, when he could speak. "Is there anything I can do?" he asked.

"No," answered Mary, roughly. "We can watch him die, and then go to the house. That's the end of us, and that's the end of him, thanks to his betting and gambling," she added, bitterly.

Christopher looked once more at his friend, the friend who had nearly ruined his life with his own. He was his friend still, and he had left him a dying command.

How should he fulfil it? He did not realize what he was asking—asking à lad of seventeen to stop the betting and gambling of the mews men. It was impossible. And Christopher was not in the mews to begin with; indeed, there seemed little prospect of his mother allowing it even now.

Still, John's voice, firm with the last message of his wasted life, steady in the light of approaching death, seemed to speak to him, seemed to tear at his very heart-strings.

"Tell 'em; tell 'em now, Johnny, for God's sake, to stop in time."

And as the boy walked slowly home with his heart full to bursting, he murmured almost beneath his breath,—

"I *will*, so help me, God!"

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE MEWS AT LAST.

GEORGE was back on leave, a fine, sunburnt fellow, happy and light-hearted, without a care in the wide world.

Mrs. Hodges looked on him almost with pride, so smart did he look in his uniform, so erect from his drill, so different from the slouching fellow who had left his home so suddenly two years before.

"It has made a man of you, George, when I was in despair about you. The army isn't such a bad place, I know, and it has done wonders for *you!* As long as Christopher don't get bitten with it; but he runs off with an idea, and there's no stopping him. Would you believe it, ever since John's death he has been unsettled and dissatisfied, and he told his father he wanted to go into the mews? The audacity of the boy, when he knows my feelings on the subject!"

No sooner had she finished speaking than Christopher himself entered the room.

"Mother," he said, in a firm voice, "I have accepted Mr. Stanley's offer of a place in the mews, and given Mr. Ready notice to look out for another boy."

If a thunderbolt had been suddenly hurled at Mrs. Hodges she could not have been more overcome than she affected to be. She opened her mouth wide, as if to speak, then cracked it to again, as if nothing would induce her to speak, and closed her eyes.

"Well done, Johnny," said George, "I believe it's the right step you're taking."

"I've got father's leave," said the boy. "Mother, don't take on so; I'll do all right, and I couldn't carry round papers for ever at seven shillings a week."

Mrs. Hodges half opened her eyes, and looked at him as if for the last time.

"Live among them *brutes*," she murmured, "and be kicked to death in less than no time—you, so small and light! Christopher, you are mad."

Then Christopher played his last card.

"Mr. Stanley's going to give me seventeen shillings a week, mother," he said, with half a twinkle in his eye.

Mrs. Hodges opened her eyes this time, and sat up in her chair, while something of a grim smile lingered round the corners of her mouth.

"They do say Mr. Stanley's got a quiet set of beasts now," said Mrs. Hodges, thawing slowly, "since that great brute kicked John the ostler into another world."

An outsider might have thought she was alluding to some untamed, savage animal at the Zoological Gardens instead of hired cab horses at a mews. But the fact remained that a different face was put on the case altogether from the moment that seventeen shillings a week was mentioned.

"Well done, Christie," said George, as they went downstairs together. "You have taken the bull by the horns and done the right thing. Mother don't really care a bit. And it's the right life for you, Christie."

"It isn't *that* I care about so much," answered Christopher, "and 'tisn't the money I am so keen on. Try as I will, I cannot get John's words out of my head. 'I want you to stop the others betting their very lives away.' That's what he said to me, George, when he was just dying. 'Betting their very lives away. It isn't the betting only,' he said; 'it's the tricks and cheating and stealing that it leads them to.'"

"*We* know some'at about that, don't we, Christie?"

"I don't suppose I can do anything," continued Christopher; "but I mean to have a try gradually.

'You must get a post in the mews and stop it. Tell 'em what it's brought me to, and the wife and the kids, and tell 'em hard, for God's sake, to stop in time.' Those were John's last words, George, and a fellow can't go on his way and pay 'em *no* attention," said Christopher, earnestly.

So Christopher, the child of the mews, went to the life he loved, and lived among the horses—and lived among the men.

CHAPTER XV.

CONCLUSION.

BUT it was no easy task he had set himself to do. It is one thing to fight down a sin oneself, to wrestle to overcome a temptation, to conquer and be strong. It is another to try to help others to do the same.

Christopher had tried it; he had tried it with John, and had failed. How could he hope to succeed with the men of the mews? And who was he that he should set himself up to be their teacher and corrector? Who was he—only a poor, tempted fellow as themselves—that he should pose as their leader?

The boy knew enough of the world to know that only by being their friend could he help them; only by being one of themselves—though with a strength born of temptation he had risen above them—could he hope to persuade them to give up that which would wreck their lives, even as it had wrecked John's. He must act towards the other men as George had acted

towards him, helping by example and silent sympathy till the moment came to speak out, and then speaking without fear. John's words rang in his ears. "Tell them, for God's sake, to stop in time." Tell them! That was what he said—that was the message from the grave—from a man just passing to the other world. Tell them! He must not be a coward. He must tell them.

He had been in the mews for some time before the opportunity, half dreaded, half wanted, arrived. Christopher had got to know the men well. Indeed, most of them had been in the mews for years, had known him from a little lad, and welcomed him amongst them gladly.

To speak to these older men seemed impossible, seemed almost impertinent. They would not listen to him any more than John listened.

Time was passing and his mission was unfulfilled. It was getting near Ascot races, and there was a good deal of work coming on, when a new lad made his appearance among them—a boy well known to Christopher as a very leader among the betting boys of the neighbourhood. He soon got intimate with the mews men, and laid on his money time after time, knowing nothing of the horses running, and less of the men to whom he entrusted his money.

One night Christopher was rubbing down his horse when he heard loud voices in the yard, and loudest and shrillest was the voice of the new boy. He heard "cheating," "sweepstakes," "odds," and epithets of hatred showered on one of the mews men.

His heart beat high. What had he done yet? The races were coming on. Betting and gambling were as bad as ever.

Something made him strong—he never knew what. Something said, "Tell them, for God's sake, tell them." Without stopping to think, with a sponge in one hand and a curry-comb in the other, with heightened colour and beating heart, Christopher strode into the yard.

"Boys," he cried, walking right into the midst of the wrangling, little knot of mews men, "boys, stop it."

"And who are *you?*" cried the boy, angrily.

"Indeed, you may well ask who am I, and what right have I to speak?" said Christopher. "But I *have* a right. I have a message for you from the grave—from one who sinned as we are sinning now—from one who has repented as we must one day repent, too. You all remember John?"

He had won their attention now. John's name

was familiar to all. Something in the boy's flushed face reduced them all to silence.

"May I tell you his last words? He sent for me when he was dying, because he had cheated me, and he could not die happy. But not only this, but because he wanted me to tell you, you in this mews—his mews—to stop it; to stop betting and gambling, cheating, and underhand playing, deceiving, stealing. 'Stop it, Johnny,' he cries to me as he lay dying, on his bed. 'Get a post in the mews and stop it. Tell 'em what it's brought me to, and tell 'em, for God's sake, to stop in time.' Mates, there sat his wife and children. Not one penny did he leave them. He wasn't a hard drinker, wasn't John. He just gambled away the children's bread and butter—betted away the wife's cup of tea." Christopher's voice broke, as he remembered that painful scene and the woman's bitter words.

Every eye was fixed on the boy's face, as earnestly, with an utter forgetfulness of self, he went on: "Mates, I ought to have spoken before, but I was a coward; Heaven forgive me. I have something else to say. Shan't we give it up?—*can't* we give it up? Let John's words make *some* difference to us. Let us fight it down to a man. Let no betting and gambling be heard in this mews. The races are coming on; let

us have no half measures. Let every man and every boy refuse to lay his money on—refuse to be dragged down, down, down, till other crimes must follow. Mates, I mean it. Save this boy. Let us help each other; let us band together. But do not let the hostler's dying words fall unheeded on our ears. 'Tell them, for God's sake, tell them to stop in time.'"

Christopher stopped, and a breathless silence fell on the men. He had entirely forgotten himself. He could hardly remember what he had said. He was very hot; his cheeks were burning. He felt but the mouthpiece delivering the message of an absent friend.

Suddenly he seemed to realize what he had done.

"I beg your pardon, mates," he murmured, "if I have said too much."

"All right, young 'un," cried one man, a notorious gambler; "you couldn't help yerself."

Silently each man moved away to his work. No one criticised, no one abused him, no one alluded to his emphatic entreaty. It was all too real, too true; it had sunk down too deep into their hearts.

Such an entreaty was *bound* to find some response, was bound to bear some fruit in the dim future. One by one the men came to talking things over with

Christopher. There was something about him so true and real and earnest, there was such deep sympathy with their difficulties in giving up such a desperate habit. Yes, because Christopher had also been tempted—had also triumphed over his temptation.

With a light heart he went about his work, with a light heart he took home his wages week by week; but from time to time as he rubbed down his horses in the stall where John had taught him so much wrong, he would raise his eyes, and, as if speaking to some hidden friend, he would say, quite loud out, "I will help them to give it up, so help *me*, God."

THE END.

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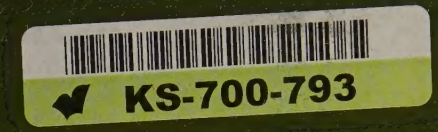
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